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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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August 13, 2002

The Honorable Robert W. Ney
Chairman
Committee on House Administration
U.S. House of Representatives
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Ney:

In light of the very few days remaining in this Congress and as a conferee and principle author of election reform legislation, I write with the utmost urgency and implore you to immediately call a meeting of the election reform conferees. Both my staff and I are available to work on this matter over the recess.

Our conference committee has been appointed to produce a consensus agreement on the most important civil rights issue of our time. Yet, strangely for a matter of such importance, 90 days after conferees have been appointed, you have yet to call a single meeting of this conference committee or in any way consult with House Judiciary Committee staff.

If we reconcile the House bill and the Senate bill into a law that will improve our democracy, every voter, minority or white, English proficient or not, poor or rich, old or young, will be able to cast a ballot and have that ballot counted; every individual with a disability will be allowed to vote with privacy and independence; and the punchcard machines that disenfranchised thousands of poor and minority voters will be discarded in the dustbin of history. However, if we fail in this endeavor, our nation will once again face the spectacle of spoiled ballots and inaccessible polling places.

We cannot succeed if we do not try, and we cannot try if we do not meet. I am particularly concerned about the fact that my staff has been totally excluded from negotiations. For example, on July 24, I asked a Judiciary staffer to attend a meeting of conference staff, and she was required to leave by a member of your staff.

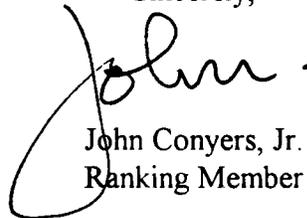
The Honorable Robert W. Ney
Page Two
August 13, 2002

Equally distressing is the fact that the House has made an offer to the Senate on election reform and neither I nor my staff was consulted or informed regarding its contents. This is no way establish consensus on such an important issue. While I appreciate *any* effort to move this vital issue forward, I was surprised to learn that your offer contained new and controversial items not included in either the House or Senate bill, including a requirement that every voter produce identification, a requirement that discriminates against the elderly, language minorities and first time voters.

I believe you are as anxious as I am to pass election reform legislation. While the Members may have policy differences over the substance of the legislative proposals, our disagreements should not be an excuse for inaction or a lack of accountability for failing to act. We should meet in an open and public conference meeting, debate our proposals and discuss our positions, vote and allow the public to evaluate our respective positions.

I would appreciate a prompt reply to this request. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John", with a large, sweeping flourish that loops back under the name.

John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member

cc: F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. Chairman, House Judiciary Committee
Steny H. Hoyer, Ranking Member, Committee on House Administration
Christopher J. Dodd, Chairman, Senate Rules Committee
Mitch McConnell, Ranking Member, Senate Rules Committee